

**HOW THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WON  
THE WAR: OPERATIONAL ART BENDS  
BUT DOES NOT BREAK IN RESPONSE TO  
ASYMMETRY**

A Monograph  
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This monograph analyzes the effectiveness of operational campaign design against an asymmetrical threat during the 1968 Tet Offensive. The focus is on conceptual elements of campaign design that are derived from theory, which incorporate the particulars of military history to the general truth of warfare. Effective campaign execution is dependent, in part, on effective campaign design that set of theoretical and doctrinal precepts that define the concerns of the operational planner. The monograph identifies lessons learned from this period that are applicable to current U.S. Joint and Army doctrine as well as lessons for planners and executors of U.S. military action under the American system of civilian control of the military. First, the monograph demonstrated the complex nature of asymmetric warfare. Finding and creating vulnerabilities and attacking those vulnerabilities with inherent strengths is the key to asymmetric warfare. Secondly, the monograph discussed the elements of campaign design that are derived from theory, which incorporate the particulars of military history to the general truth of warfare. Some of the more common conceptual actions are to understand the type and scope of conflict, define the enemy and friendly center of gravity, identify possible culminating points, select lines of operation, determine decisive points, and understanding the dangers of paralysis commonly known as cybershock. The third section identifies the strategy and identifies particular military objectives identified by the North Vietnamese. The monograph offered three different assessments. The first assessment was how the U.S. was an asymmetric threat to the PAVN and Vietcong. This assessment was based of strategic asymmetry using the forms of asymmetry that are method, will, and patience. The method that both opponents selected to fight the war is what caused the U.S. to be asymmetric to the PAVN and Vietcong. The second assessment was an assessment of the Tet Offensive to see if it contained some of the essential elements of campaign design. The Tet Offensive did contain some of the more common conceptual actions which were to define the center of gravity, determine decisive points, select lines of operation, and understanding the dangers of paralysis commonly known as cybershock. The third assessment was of the effectiveness and efficiency of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) planning and execution using Naveh's criteria. The North Vietnamese's plan responded positively to the following criteria: first, it reflected the cognitive tension, transpiring from the polarization between the general orientation towards the strategic aim and the adherence to the tactical missions. Secondly, the planned action was synergetic. The monograph concludes that an organization needs to stop viewing and presenting asymmetry as a negative thing. Organizations need to exploit asymmetries by creating their own asymmetries depending on the enemy's posture and situation. They need to design and coordinate operations and campaigns of strategic significance with a view of attaining a single strategic aim.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **HOW THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WON THE WAR: OPERATIONAL ART BENDS BUT DOES NOT BREAK IN RESPONSE TO ASYMMETRY By Major Dale S. Ringler, USA, 54 Pages**

This monograph analyzes the effectiveness of operational campaign design against an asymmetrical threat during the 1968 Tet Offensive. The focus is on conceptual elements of campaign design that are derived from theory, which incorporate the particulars of military history to the general truth of warfare. Effective campaign execution is dependent, in part, on effective campaign design that set of theoretical and doctrinal precepts that define the concerns of the operational planner. The monograph identifies lessons learned from this period that are applicable to current U.S. Joint and Army doctrine as well as lessons for planners and executors of U.S. military action under the American system of civilian control of the military.

First, the monograph demonstrated the complex nature of asymmetric warfare. Finding and creating vulnerabilities and attacking those vulnerabilities with inherent strengths is the key to asymmetric warfare. Secondly, the monograph discussed the elements of campaign design that are derived from theory, which incorporate the particulars of military history to the general truth of warfare. Some of the more common conceptual actions are to understand the type and scope of conflict, define the enemy and friendly center of gravity, identify possible culminating points, select lines of operation, determine decisive points, and understanding the dangers of paralysis commonly known as cybershock. The third section identifies the strategy and identifies particular military objectives identified by the North Vietnamese.

The monograph offered three different assessments. The first assessment was how the U.S. was an asymmetric threat to the PAVN and Vietcong. This assessment was based of strategic asymmetry using the forms of asymmetry that are method, will, and patience. The method that both opponents selected to fight the war is what caused the U.S. to be asymmetric to the PAVN and Vietcong. The second assessment was an assessment of the Tet Offensive to see if it contained some of the essential elements of campaign design. The Tet Offensive did contain some of the more common conceptual actions which were to define the center of gravity, determine decisive points, select lines of operation, and understanding the dangers of paralysis commonly known as cybershock. The third assessment was of the effectiveness and efficiency of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) planning and execution using Naveh's criteria. The North Vietnamese's plan responded positively to the following criteria: first, it reflected the cognitive tension, transpiring from the polarization between the general orientation towards the strategic aim and the adherence to the tactical missions. Secondly, the planned action was synergetic.

The monograph concludes that an organization needs to stop viewing and presenting asymmetry as a negative thing. Organizations need to exploit asymmetries by creating their own asymmetries depending on the enemy's posture and situation. They need to design and coordinate operations and campaigns of strategic significance with a view of attaining a single strategic aim.

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## INTRODUCTION

An outstanding success of our party consists in its making a correct appraisal of the correlation of forces between ourselves and the enemy, perceiving the emergence of historic opportunity and taking the strategic decision to liberate the South and completely defeat the U.S. neocolonialist war of aggression. Moreover, our Party closely followed the dialectical development of the correlation forces between ourselves and the enemy throughout the offensive, actively created and seized favorable opportunities and launched a daring, determined and well-timed offensive to achieve victory within the shortest possible time.

General Vo Nguyen Giap, 1975<sup>i</sup>

This passage taken from Giap's analysis of the Vietnamese victory, is presented not to duplicate the Vietnamese victory or their strategy, tactics, or doctrine, but rather, to apply the same kind of creative, revolutionary and military art to future conditions, which may face U.S. forces. This may be accomplished by analyzing a historical case study of campaign design, which is an integral and critical aspect of operational art. Operational art, the method of linking strategic objectives into operational design and ultimately, tactical action, may itself be assessed in an asymmetrical environment.<sup>ii</sup> In conventional conflict, operational art enables a commander to best use the resources to accomplish the strategic objective. The goal of operational art is to shape the environment as to time, place, and resources in order to stack the odds in favor of the tactical commander, to accomplish strategic goals. It appears that countering an asymmetric threat requires the most efficient use of limited resources to accomplish the strategic objective. This is the author's hypothesis.

There are plenty of postmortems on how and why the U.S. lost Vietnam. It might be more interesting to think about how the people won Vietnam. More specifically, was the key to the People's Army of Vietnam victory a sound application of operational art? This monograph investigates whether operational art is useful against an asymmetrical threat. The author's methodology assesses if the theory of operational art applies to a force confronting an asymmetric threat. Does operational art, an operational concept developed as an analytical tool for symmetrical warfare have utility against an asymmetrical threat? The focus is on the linkage of

national strategic ends with military means and ways. In the 1968 Tet Offensive case study, the asymmetric threat is us, The United States of America. This question is answered by analyzing the effectiveness of operational campaign design of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN).

The criteria used to determine effectiveness of operational campaign design are derived from Shimon Naveh's, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence*. Dr. Naveh is a lecturer in the Department of History at Tel Aviv University and a Senior fellow of the Cummings Center for Russia and East European Studies. According to Naveh, the military plan should respond positively to the following criteria: first, it must reflect the cognitive tension, transpiring from the polarization between the general orientation towards the strategic aim and the adherence to the tactical missions. Secondly, the planned action should be synergetic, i.e. throughout its entirety, represented by the initial aim; the system should yield a general product that is significantly greater than the linear arithmetic sum of its components' accomplishments. Moreover, in order to be regarded as operational, the matter must reflect the notion of synthesis, through the aspect of combined arms combat, amalgamation of the various forces and forms of warfare, and the integration of the various forces and formations within several geographical units and different dimensions of time.<sup>iii</sup>

Section I begins by examining the complex nature of an asymmetrical threat. The purpose of this section is to explain an asymmetrical threat, the other major component of the author's research question. By understanding the definitions and possible asymmetric threats and methods, one will better understand how the U.S. was an asymmetric threat to the PAVN and Vietcong. In addition, it will demonstrate the importance of clearly defining the strategic goals and the military ways and means to achieve them when designing a campaign plan. Section II explains the historical development and fundamentals of operational art. The fundamentals established in this chapter will help determine if the campaign plan examined in the case study exhibited the fundamentals of operational art. This section will start with the contributions of Jomini and Clausewitz to strategic planning. This section discusses the elements of campaign design that are



derived from theory, which incorporate the particulars of military history to the general truth of warfare. These concepts aid in focusing the planning effort. The commander should select the conceptual framework based on the effects he wants to create. Some of the more common conceptual actions are to understand the type and scope of conflict, define the enemy and friendly center of gravity, identify possible culminating points, select lines of operation, determine decisive points, and understanding the dangers of paralysis commonly known as cybershock. Section III analyzes the strategic environment and the national strategy goals of North Vietnam, identifying particular objectives assigned to the military. The purpose is to examine if a linkage exists between the operational objectives and the strategic endstate. Section IV offers three different assessments. The first assessment is how the U.S. was an asymmetric threat to the PAVN and Vietcong. This assessment will be based of strategic asymmetry using the forms of asymmetry which are method, will, and patience. The second assessment is an assessment of the Tet Offensive to see if it contained some of the essential elements of campaign design. Some of the more common conceptual actions are to define the center of gravity, determine decisive points, select lines of operation, and understanding the dangers of paralysis commonly known as cybershock. The third is an assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) planning and execution using two of Naveh's criteria. The last section provides several lessons from the campaign planning process of PAVN, and offers recommendations for current U.S. military campaign planners confronting an asymmetrical threat.

## SECTION 1

### ASYMMETRIC WARFARE

History demonstrates dire consequences for nations that enter war without understanding the nature of conflict. This section focuses on how not understanding the nature of conflict creates asymmetry between forces. The eminent British military historian Sir Michael Howard saw the military's deficiencies, which can include the ability to quickly adjust to asymmetric warfare, as stemming from the military's bureaucratic and hierarchical structure, and from the inability of the military to test new ideas about war objectively. These deficiencies prevent militaries from gaining a clear view of the 'next' war.<sup>iv</sup> Howard's answer to the inherent uncertainty is to cultivate the talents of adaptability and flexibility.

In these circumstances when everybody starts wrong, the advantage goes to the side which can most quickly adjust itself to the new and unfamiliar environment and learn from its mistakes.—It is this flexibility both in the minds of the Armed Forces and their organization, that needs above all to be developed in peacetime.<sup>v</sup>

I am tempted to declare dogmatically that whatever doctrine the Armed Forces are working on now, they have got it wrong. I am also tempted to declare that it does not matter that they have got it wrong. What does matter is their capacity to get it right quickly when the moment arrives.—it is the task of military science in an age of peace to prevent the doctrine from being too badly wrong.<sup>vi</sup>

While certainty about possible environments is impossible, study of different environments is necessary to prevent 'being too badly wrong.' One of the environments requiring examination is the multitude of asymmetric challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

This chapter demonstrates the complex nature of asymmetric warfare. By understanding the definitions and possible asymmetric threats and methods, one will better understand how the U.S. was an asymmetric threat to the PAVN and Vietcong. In addition, it will demonstrate the importance of clearly defining the strategic goals and the military ways and means to achieve them when designing a campaign plan. The first step is to understand strategic asymmetry.

While several definitions of strategic asymmetry have appeared in Department of Defense documents, most have simply codified the specific security problems or threats faced the United

States today or have reflected such an "American-centrism" that their analytical use is limited.<sup>vii</sup> A more general and complete definition of strategic asymmetry provided by Strategic Studies Institute in *ASYMMETRY AND U.S. MILITARY STRATEGY: Definition, Background, and Strategic Concepts* would be:

In the realm of military affairs and national security, asymmetry is acting, organizing, and thinking differently than opponents in order to maximize one's own advantages, exploit an opponent's weakness, attain the initiative, or gain greater freedom of action. It can be political-strategic, military-strategic, operational or a combination of these. It can entail different methods, technologies, values, organizations, time perspectives, or some combination of these. It can be deliberate or by default. It can be discrete or pursued in conjunction with symmetric approaches. It can have both psychological and physical dimensions.<sup>viii</sup>

The essential element of this definition is the idea that significant differences of some kind exist that maximize one's own advantages, exploits an opponents weakness, attains the initiative, or gains freedom of action. However, elements of this definition warrant further discussion. The following discussion will center on the dimensions of asymmetry and the forms of asymmetry. The dimensions of asymmetry which are pertinent to this monograph include deliberate and default, and material and psychological. The forms of asymmetry that are pertinent include method, will, and patience

Strategic asymmetry can be deliberate or by default. The United States is relatively unique in that its strategists actively think about asymmetry and how best to use it or control it. More often, antagonists in a conflict or war simply use what they have and do what they know how to do. That the outcome is asymmetric is more accidental than planned. Mao held that guerilla war was seldom decisive but should be used as a preface for large-scale mobile war.<sup>ix</sup> When countering asymmetric threats, understanding whether the asymmetry is deliberate or by default is important since an enemy using deliberate asymmetry is likely to make more adjustments and thus requires a more flexible response.

Finally, asymmetry can be material or psychological. The two concepts are interrelated; thus, a material asymmetric advantage often generates psychological advantages. Throughout history,

there have been states and militaries that were particularly adept at manipulating psychological asymmetry, often by propagating an image of fierceness. A combination of material and psychological asymmetry seems to be most effective. Often psychological asymmetry is cheaper than the material variant, but is harder to sustain.<sup>x</sup>

According to Steven Metz and Douglas V. Johnson II in *ASYMMETRY AND U.S. MILITARY STRATEGY: Definition, Background, and Strategic Concepts*, there are at least six forms of asymmetry that are relevant in the realm of national security and warfare. However, only three will be discussed that are relevant to the monograph. The three forms of asymmetry are method, will, and patience.<sup>xi</sup>

Method as an asymmetry entails using different operational concepts or tactical doctrines than the enemy. Examples include guerrilla war and other kinds of nonlinear concepts. During the 1968, Tet Offensive air assaults and airdrops would entail an asymmetry of operational concept. Many of the operational concepts that the army anticipates using in the future such as advanced vertical envelopment with mobile, protected forces would also entail an asymmetry of operational concept.<sup>xii</sup>

Asymmetries of will are important when one adversary sees its survival or vital interest at stake, and the other is protecting or promoting less-than vital interests. An asymmetry of will leads one opponent with the higher stake to be willing to bear greater costs, accept greater risk, and undertake actions which the less committed opponent might avoid on moral or legal grounds. Asymmetries of will are most relevant at the strategic level. At the operational and tactical level, the asymmetry of will equates to the asymmetry of morale.<sup>xiii</sup>

Finally, asymmetries of patience or time perspective can be significant. Patience or time is conceptually linked to an asymmetry of will and morale, but more often than not soldiers operates in cross-culture conflicts. Specifically, an asymmetry of time perspective may occur when one opponent enters a war willing to see it continue for a long period of time while their opponent is only able to sustain their will for a short war. For a variety of reasons, the United States prefers

the quick resolution of armed conflict. There is a sense on the part of American leaders that the congressional and public support for any use of force that does not involve vital interest has a limited life span.<sup>xiv</sup> The concept that patience and time are conceptually linked to an asymmetry of will and morale is linked to the concluding paragraph of Mao's section titled "The Three Stages of Protracted War." In this paragraph, Mao explains how to shorten the war.

Specifically, the only way is to strive to win more battles and wear down the enemy's forces, develop guerrilla warfare to reduce the enemy occupied territory to a minimum, consolidate and expand the whole front to rally the whole nation, build up new armies and develop new war industries, promote political, economic and cultural progress, mobilize the workers, peasants, businessmen, intellectuals, and other sections of the people, disintegrate the enemy forces and win over their soldiers, carry on international propaganda to secure foreign support, and win the support of the Japanese people and other oppressed peoples. Only by doing this can we reduce the duration of the war. There is no magic short cut.<sup>xv</sup>

The essential point in this passage after deciphering the laundry list of events is that all the instruments of power are mentioned in one form or another. This is essential because it demonstrates the need of a strategy that encompasses all the instruments of power to bring a conflict to conclusion.

Asymmetric attacks pose dilemmas to both friendly and enemy forces. Asymmetric attack could require the disadvantaged side to alter Rules of Engagement (ROE), organization, doctrine, training, or equipment. However, the opponent always has the option of fighting the way he initially intended, and this is exactly Howard's point. The higher the echelon, the longer it takes to remedy an adversary's asymmetric advantage. Commanders and planners must anticipate asymmetries and take preventive measures that reduce the adversary's advantage. As forces protect against hostile asymmetric action, commanders and planners identify and exploit friendly capabilities that pose asymmetric challenges to the enemy.<sup>xvi</sup>

This chapter demonstrated the complex nature of asymmetric warfare. By understanding the definitions and possible asymmetric threats and methods, one will better understand, during the case study, how the U.S. was an asymmetric threat to the PAVN and Vietcong. In addition, it

demonstrated the importance of the requirement that the military commander make clear both the strategic goals and the military ways and means required in a campaign plan. The discussion centered on the dimensions of asymmetry and the forms of asymmetry. The dimensions of asymmetry include deliberate and default, and material and psychological. The forms of asymmetry that are pertinent include method, will, and patience. Sir Michael Howard was correct in identifying that the advantage goes to the side, which can most quickly adjust itself to the new and unfamiliar environment and learn from its mistakes. It is this flexibility both in the minds of the Armed Forces and their organization that needs above all to be developed. Finding and creating vulnerabilities and attacking those vulnerabilities with inherent strengths is the key to asymmetric warfare.

## SECTION II

### THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF OPERATIONAL ART

Operational art is a relatively new concept in U.S. Army doctrine. Although operational art was introduced into Army doctrine in the 1986 version of *FM 100-5, Operations*, it is not a new concept in warfare. The two great interpreters of the Napoleonic experience, Jomini and Clausewitz developed most of the theoretical foundations of operational art in the nineteenth century. Both men were interested in the application of military force to achieve political goals. The measure of determining how this force was to be applied was strategy. The key mechanism of strategy was the campaign plan.<sup>xvii</sup>

Effective campaign design is derived from theoretical and doctrinal precepts that define the concerns of the operational planner. The first element of campaign design is to identify an adequate end state, to formulate a set of strategic goals, and to establish effective connectivity of ends to means, including analysis of cost versus gains.<sup>xviii</sup> The elements of campaign design are derived from theory, which incorporate the particulars of military history to the general truth of warfare. These concepts can aid in focusing the planning effort. There are many different conceptual systems the commander can use to establish this focus. The commander should select the conceptual framework based on the effects he wants to create. Some of the more common conceptual actions are to understand that war is a continuation of policy, the type and scope of conflict, define the enemy and friendly center of gravity, identify possible culminating points, select lines of operation, determine decisive points, and understanding the dangers of paralysis commonly known as cybershock.

Carl von Clausewitz's classic theoretical piece, *On War* provides four useful concepts for designing asymmetric campaigns. The nature of conflict, paradoxical trinity, centers of gravity, and culminating point provide insight into the nature of asymmetric conflict. The above theoretical concepts allow the commander and planner the ability to analyze a system and the

interrelationship of the sub-components that are essential to determining effects required to affect that system.

The first concept that Clausewitz proposed is that war is a continuation of policy. This is one level above the operational level but is an important concept in focusing the planner. As a continuation of policy, war is hardly ever “unlimited.” Many military leaders have difficulty with this conclusion. The difficulty and failure to understand the elements and interaction causes a failure in planning. Clausewitz maintained that the degree of force that must be used against the enemy depends on the scale of political demands on either side. The military mind thinks in relative combat power, thus to plan operations and campaigns without the overwhelming combat power necessary to destroy the enemy’s army is frustrating and discouraging. The key to success is the ability to determine the limited military objectives that can achieve the political aim with the force structure allocated. This thought demonstrates that war can become limited to the fighting force not only in aims, but also in means.

For Clausewitz, strategy was “the use of the engagement for the purpose of war.”<sup>xix</sup> By today’s definition, this is our current operational level of war. The strategist devised the campaign and decided how to use battles to achieve his aims. Clausewitz discussed the elements of strategy but did not discuss the practical art of formulating a campaign plan.<sup>xx</sup> However, in his investigation of the nature of war, Clausewitz developed several operational concepts. Clausewitz believed that a primary task in planning was to identify the enemy’s center of gravity. He defined the center of gravity as “the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends.”<sup>xxi</sup> The ultimate substance of enemy strength must be traced back to the fewest possible sources, and ideally to one. However, how does one identify the essential variables within the system to the ultimate substance of enemy strength? The answer is found in the paradoxical trinity.

Clausewitz’s idea of a paradoxical trinity tries to explain critical elements, which influence the selection of a center of gravity. The art of war consists of an understanding of the balance



between these elements and the ability to identify the correct center of gravity to achieve the political aim. Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity was formed of primordial violence and hatred, chance, and reason. These aspects mainly concern the people, military, and government respectively. The three elements are mutually dependent of one another yet their interaction concerning the effect of military matters must be considered. To make this point Clausewitz states, "A theory that ignores anyone of them, or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with reality."<sup>xxii</sup> He tries to explain this issue further by maintaining that a theory of war must maintain the proper "balance between these three tendencies, like an object suspended between three magnets."<sup>xxiii</sup> Each contributes its own influence and power yet they all contribute to the balance of the system as a whole. In military matters, for this system to be in balance, the military must focus its objectives on the political aim.

Another operational concept, which Clausewitz introduced, was the culminating point. Clausewitz observed that every offensive inherently lost force as it continued to pursue the attack. The point, at which the attacker has only sufficient strength to conduct a successful defense, he labeled the culminating point.<sup>xxiv</sup> All planners and leaders must be aware of the culminating point and plan accordingly. In the offense, decisive operations must occur before this point. For the defender, the time at which the attacker passes his culminating point may be the very best time to conduct a counter offensive.<sup>xxv</sup> The next step is to examine Jomini's contributions to strategic planning.

Jomini was much more detailed with his guidance on strategic planning. Like Clausewitz, Jomini's use of the word strategy is today's current definition of the operational level of war. Jomini's major contributions for operational concepts were selection of decisive points and lines of communication. At the end of this process of selection was the final deployment of the decisive battle. Although Jomini did not develop many of these concepts, he put them together and popularized them.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The selection of decisive points was essential for strategy. Ground features, relation of the local features to the ultimate strategic aim and positions occupied by the respective force determined the decisive points of the battlefield. Jomini also discussed the proper time and force to attain the decisive point. Again, the difficulty was in the determination of the decisive point through analysis. The analysis consisted of identification of the benefits, risks and correctly weighing the two to achieve success. The identification of the benefits, risks and correctly weighing the two to achieve success was an essential element of the art of giving proper direction to the force. This concept was the basis of strategy. Strategy, as the key to warfare, required an analysis of the enemy, terrain and yourself applied to the basic principles. Jomini referred to this information as military statistics and geography.

Jomini's other contribution concerned logistics. For Jomini, logistics "was the practical art of moving armies."<sup>xxvii</sup> This art embraced not only moving armies, but also their sustainment, which required the establishment of lines of communication. Jomini was aware of the significance of logistics in campaign planning. He insisted that one of the principles of warfare was the importance of attacking and denying the enemy's lines of communication without compromising your own.<sup>xxviii</sup> Despite these historical examples of essential elements of operational art, it is not until the 1920s, in the Soviet Union, that the theory of operational art was developed to describe the changes in the nature of modern warfare.<sup>xxix</sup>

Last century's world wars expanded combat's effects in terms of time and space, creating a more pronounced gap between strategy and tactics using maneuver and attrition. Operational art serves to fill this expanding gap. The theoretical concepts derived from Clausewitz and Jomini will aid in the assessment of the campaign case study. The Clausewitzian and Jominian conceptual actions used for the assessment are to define the center of gravity, select lines of operation, and determine decisive points. The assessment will examine if the case study contained some of the essential elements of campaign design. If some of the more common conceptual actions were present within the case study, there is the potential argument that operational art was

demonstrated. However, there must be more to operational art than linking strategy and tactics with maneuver and attrition.

Dr. James Schneider from the School of Advanced Military Studies described cybershock as a defeat mechanism that drives an organized system into a disorganized state through the destruction of the information connectivity between the parts of a complex system. This disintegration leads to the destruction of the will to fight, since complex systems operate by reliable and freely flowing information.<sup>xxx</sup> Schneider suggested that the concept of cybershock is a type of defeat mechanism distinct from attrition and maneuver. He argued that this defeat mechanism emerged with the onset of operational art and points to the industrial revolution as the beginning of increasingly complex armies and military operations. Commanders and their staffs had to, “design and execute a whole complex mosaic of deep, extended operations to defeat an adversary.”<sup>xxxi</sup> The new degree of complexity created a vulnerability to what Dr. Schneider called the danger of paralysis.

The concept of cybershock included five forms of paralysis. The first was denying the enemy comprehensive information he needs through operational security, psychological operations, and deception. The second form was electronic means to rupture organizational coherence, creating what Schneider described as a seizure of the opponent’s nervous system. Next was active and vigorous reconnaissance, the crucial element in the struggle for relevant information. Fourth, the shock caused by surprise induces a broad sense of panic, and lastly, the high tempo of the friendly forces imparts a cybernetic daze in the enemy. The enemy nervous system is overloaded, and the enemy is confused, finally reduced to subordinate units and then into disarray.<sup>xxxii</sup>

In a theoretical paper titled *Vulcan’s Anvil: The American Civil War and the Emergence of Operational Art*, Schneider differentiated between classical strategy and operational art by describing maneuver and battle. The classical strategy in the Alexandrian genre was one of concentrated maneuver and concentrated battle. Classical strategy in the Napoleonic genre was one of concentric maneuver, yet retained concentrated battle. In contrast, the characterization of

operational art is one of extended maneuver and deep battle.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Schneider offered eight distinctive attributes and definitions inherent to operational art, however this monograph is only concerned with one of them.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

**Distributed Enemy:** An operationally durable formation operates most effectively against a similarly designed opponent. If there is nothing to strike, the operational artist may have trouble describing a way to link tactical means to strategic end<sup>xxxv</sup>

The eight attributes make good sense when viewed from the standpoint of artist vice the empirical scientist. They provide content to operational art, but not the exacting definition required by science. For example, the distributed enemy attribute implies the necessity of facing a similarly designed opponent in order to achieve operational success. If this is so, does the lack of a similarly designed opponent negate the importance of operational art? The monograph's author believes the answer to be no. The attribute bends, but it does not break. The opponent still exists and requires greater imagination and different techniques to engage fully. Conflict must be accepted as it comes to us, because of its interactive nature. Regardless of the form of conflict one is faced with, it is imperative to be able to adapt to conflict's very complex nature quickly.

This section explained the historical development and fundamentals of operational art. The fundamentals established in this chapter will help determine if the campaign plan examined in the case study exhibited the fundamentals of operational art. This section started with the contributions of Jomini and Clausewitz to strategic planning. This section then discussed the elements of campaign design that are derived from theory, which incorporate the particulars of military history to the general truth of warfare. These concepts aid in focusing the planning effort. The commander should select the conceptual framework based on the effects he wants to create. Some of the more common conceptual actions are to understand the type and scope of conflict, define the enemy and friendly center of gravity, identify possible culminating points, select lines of operation, determine decisive points, and understanding the dangers of paralysis

commonly known as cybershock. However, what happens if the commander does not understand or chooses the wrong conceptual framework based on the effects he wants to create?

The 10,000-day Vietnam War proved to be the longest counter-guerilla conflict fought by the U.S. military during the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was also the first time a technologically superior U.S. force was defeated, in an operational and strategic sense. The Vietnam War killed more than fifty-five thousand Americans, destroyed one American Presidential administration, and ended in the loss of South Vietnam to the Communist government of the North. It also effectively destroyed the American military as a potent force for nearly a decade.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The next section analyzes the strategic environment and the national strategy goals of North Vietnam, identifying particular objectives assigned to the military. The purpose is to examine if a linkage exists between the operational objectives and the strategic endstate.

## SECTION III

### 1968 TET OFFENSIVE

#### Overall Strategy

Every minute, hundreds of thousands of people die all over the world. The Life or death of hundred, a thousand, or tens of thousands of human beings, even if they are our own compatriots, represents really very little.

General Vo Nguyen Giap<sup>xxxvii</sup>

The Geneva Accords of 1954 that partitioned Vietnam reflected the actual military situation of the time more accurately than would be admitted by those who claim the Viet Minh had really won the right to control the entire country. Nonetheless, there were elements in Ho Chi Minh's entourage who felt that pressure from the Soviet Union to accept the partition at Geneva had cheated the Viet Minh out of the full fruits of victory over France. The Communists believed that the Viet Minh were the only organized force of any consequence in Vietnam, and since the southern half was ravaged by war and politically fragmented, a confident expectation that the South would somehow fall under Hanoi's control seemed amply justified in the early post Geneva period.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

The war in South Vietnam arose essentially out of Communist North Vietnam's frustration over the refusal of the southern republic to collapse. The struggle's violent phase began in the 1958-1959 period, when Hanoi found the steadily increasing stability and prosperity of South Vietnam intolerable and made its decision to eradicate its neighbor by force of arms. This commitment to the reunification of the country under Communist control was basic to Hanoi's plan.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Ever since its beginnings as an organized movement, Vietnamese Communism has been distinguished by an extraordinary continuity of leadership, an exceptional ability to outmaneuver and submerge its opponents, a noteworthy flexibility in tactical approaches to unswerving strategic goals, and a remarkable ability to communicate to the Vietnamese people in terms of nationalism.<sup>xl</sup> The supreme command for the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) had a coherent

strategy for conquering South Vietnam that the U.S. neither fully appreciated nor effectively countered. In general terms, Communist strategists followed Mao Tse-Tung's principles of guerilla war. However, the Vietnamese Communists adapted strategies that leveraged the vulnerabilities in their opponent's strategy. The strategy was devised in the 1960s when America only had advisors in Vietnam, and tenaciously clung to it during the build up of U.S. forces until final victory. In essence, it proved a war –winning strategy.<sup>xli</sup>

Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap, which erased the line between military and civilian, developed the winning strategy by ruling out the notion of noncombatant. Their strategy precluded, by definition, the disinterested onlooker. All people became weapons of war. As weapons, all were expendable as any weapon in war. This was the essence of their strategy.<sup>xlii</sup>

According to Douglas Pike, author of *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam*, the strategy that Ho Chi Minh and Giap formed was termed *dau tranh* or, translated in English, to struggle. The strategy is a concept of military strategy employed by the Vietnamese Communist in defeating three of the world's great powers. Those powers are Japan, France and the United States. It is difficult to call the *dau tranh* strategy specifically a military strategy, for it consisted and depended upon much more. The strategy contained two elements, which must operate together. The two elements are the Armed *dau tranh* and the Political *dau tranh*. The dualism of *dau tranh* is that neither can be successful alone, only when combined.<sup>xliii</sup>

Mao and Giap consider political *dau tranh* and armed *dau tranh* as the jaws of the pincers used to attack the enemy. The pincers of *dau tranh* close on the enemy. They represent the complete strategy. All actions taken in war including military attack or guerrilla ambush, propaganda broadcast or official statement at the conference table, every mission abroad, every decision taken from the Party cell in the village to the Politburo in Hanoi, come within the scope and framework of the two *dau tranhs*. To Mao, Giap and every soldier there was nothing else.<sup>xliv</sup> Douglas Pike makes a point to reinforce that this concept may seem esoteric to the westerner, but it is second nature to the ordinary Vietnamese soldier.<sup>xlv</sup>

The term every soldier, as discussed above, potentially includes every citizen. The people, as an instrument of war, are the hub of all power for the *dau tranh* strategy. The mystic surrounding it involves the organization, mobilization, and motivation of people, all the people. The sequence is to control the people, forge them into a weapon, and then hurl the weapon into battle. Douglas Pike author of *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam*, states, “those locked in combat understand the proxy nature of the people as an instrument of war. Only outsiders are confused as to who is fighting whom or what the fight is about.”<sup>xlvi</sup>

The goal of *dau tranh* is to seize power by disabling the society, using special means, chiefly organizational. In fact, organization could be considered the friendly center of gravity of *dau tranh*, which the North Vietnamese needed to protect. The basic instrument is a united front, an organization of organizations, casting a giant web over the people. These organizations become channels of communication, which is their primary use. Through organization, mobilization becomes possible. With mobilization, comes motivation. The people, now organized, mobilized, and motivated are set against their own society to drain it of its coherent strength. In the end, victory goes to the side that gets the best organized, stays the best organized, and can most successfully disorganize the other.<sup>xlvi</sup>

It is now time to examine in detail the strategy that disorganized the opponent. The examination will aid in the assessment of how the U.S. was an asymmetric threat to the PAVN and Vietcong. The assessment will be based on strategic asymmetry using the forms of asymmetry that are method, will, and patience. The examination divides *dau tranh* into three parts. The three parts are armed *dau tranh*, the connection between political and armed *dau tranh*, and political *dau tranh*.

In the famed Party Plenum Resolution 15 (13 May 1959), which is generally credited with having, in effect, declared the start of the Vietnam war describes armed *dau tranh* as: “Armed *dau tranh* is to make the people rise up to lower the enemy's prestige, to destroy the local enemy governmental administration, to establish our people's government administration where



possible....<sup>xlviii</sup> Armed *dau tranh* had a strategy for regular forces and another for protracted conflict. Regular force strategy included both high tech and limited offensive warfare; protracted conflict included both Maoist and neo-revolutionary guerilla warfare.<sup>xlix</sup>

The basic objective in *dau tranh* strategy is to put armed conflict into the context of political dissidence. It is now time to examine the partnership that makes the two arms into a single instrument, what could perhaps be the hinge of *dau tranh* strategy. While armed and political *dau tranh* may designate separate clusters of activities, conceptually they cannot be separated. The commander and the planners of this strategy constantly faced the task of the proper division of resources and the question of how much to the armed *dau tranh* and how much to political *dau tranh*.<sup>1</sup>

Pike argues that a constant struggle existed between Giap and professional generals on one hand and Truong Chinh, the party, and political generals on the other over which arm of the pincer should predominate. After 1959, when the Lao Dong party in Hanoi decided to launch *dau tranh* in the South, until 1965, political *dau tranh* prevailed. Then it shifted to armed *dau tranh* until mid 1968. Pike also makes the contention that the armed *dau tranh* that was being executed until mid 1968 seems to have followed a protracted war rather than regular force strategy.<sup>li</sup>

To consider a protracted conflict it is necessary to exploit political *dau tranh* to leverage the psychological dimension of your own soldiers and the opponents'. Protracted conflict has several advantages. It allows time to be used as a trade off for superior enemy size and strength. It creates in the enemy camp a sense of endlessness, of conflict going on for what seems like eternity with no hope of victory. The secondary effect of protracted conflict, rather than the issue of war itself, becomes the chief destructive force at work, eroding fundamental virtues and values such as loyalty, integrity, and honor, without which society cannot exist.<sup>lii</sup> What is essential in a protracted war is to convince the other side that you mean to fight a protracted conflict and have the will and the capability to do so. "Even if you are patently unable to fight a fifty-year war, you must never let the enemy realize that."<sup>liii</sup>

Political *dau tranh* included *dich van* (action among the enemy), *binh van* (action among the military) and *dan van* (action among the people). As stated above, the key to these three vans is organization because through organization stems communication. Communications converts abstraction into reality.<sup>liv</sup> It is important to see that the *dich van* phenomena as a communicational effort to restructure the semantic environment. Perception is altered through propaganda. The plan for this “action among the enemy” campaign was to present America and the world with a single, unified image of North Vietnam. The doctrinal framework of this campaign consisted of two basic assertions: first, certainty of victory for the just side (or the righteous, the deserving, previously known as God’s side); and secondly, monopolization of virtue (and the corresponding vilification of the enemy).<sup>lv</sup> The second van program, *binh van*’s (action among the military) goal was to destroy or weaken the South Vietnam armed forces and governmental structures by nonmilitary means. Although *binh van* was not a military device, it was ultimately tied with armed *dau tranh*.<sup>lvi</sup> The third of the three van programs that composed political *dau tranh* was *dan van* (action among the people), meaning the people controlled by the national Liberation Front-People’s Revolutionary Government (NLF-PRG). This program consisted of the administrative and motivational activity of the liberated, or safe-haven, area, that portion of the country under communist control. These areas were the areas used by PAVN and Vietcong forces for physical and psychological rest.<sup>lvii</sup> Again communication was key in *dan van*. Special agit-prop cadres employed most of the standard communist agitation and propaganda devices and managed the program.

In summary, the *dau tranh* strategy put warfare into a new conceptual framework. Two broad conclusions can be made. First, its essence was the idea of people as the chief instrument of warfare. All people, without exception, were regarded as weapons of war. The purpose of the van programs was to create the second pincer that would close on the enemy with armed *dau tranh*. Second, the *dau tranh* strategy can confound the enemy’s strategic response by creating

what might be called a crisis of perception management. The major rule is that military force is always seen in a political context.

### **Planning the Campaign**

By understanding dau tranh, General Giap and the planners understood the strategic endstate. The endstate for the 1968 Tet Offensive was to effect a withdrawal of American forces from South Vietnam to bring about negotiations leading to a new Communist dominated government in the south. To achieve this endstate, the National Liberation Front fought on three fronts: political, military and diplomatic. The political battle involved mobilizing support from the people of South Vietnam while undermining the South Vietnamese government. The military component required confronting the U.S. and their allies on the battlefield with the intent to inflict losses. The battlefield had no objectives that were essential to retain. The diplomatic element of the three-prong strategy focused on mobilizing international opposition to the American war effort and promoting anti-war sentiment in the United States. As explained by a high ranking Viet Cong:

Every military clash, every demonstration, every propaganda appeal was seen as part of an integrated whole, each had consequences far beyond its immediately apparent results. It was a framework that allowed us to view battles as psychological events.<sup>lviii</sup>

In mid 1967, the communist high command decided that the time is ripe for the crowning psychological event, a surprise nation wide offensive to coincide with the TET holidays.

In July 1967, the Communist high command, including political and military leaders from both North and South Vietnam, met in Hanoi. They were very concerned about the aggressive American tactics during 1967. The American strategy seemed to indicate a need to change their battlefield strategy. Heretofore their battlefield strategy had relied upon well-planned, periodic small to medium sized surgical strikes against selected targets and daily small scale actions designed to raise the enemy's anxiety level and destroy his self confidence. A Viet Cong general explains:

In the spring of 1967, Westmoreland began his second campaign. It was very fierce. Certain of our people were very discouraged. There was much discussion on the course of the war-should we continue main force efforts, or should we pull back into a more local strategy. However, by the middle of 1967 we concluded that you had not reversed the balance of forces on the battlefield. Therefore, we decided to carry out one decisive battle to force President Johnson to de-escalate the war.<sup>lix</sup>

The July conference in Hanoi decreed that the Tet General Offensive would carry the fighting into previously untouched South Vietnamese urban centers. Here the people would rally to the National Liberation Front and overthrow Thieu's government. Since 1968 was also an election year in America, the successful offensive would help convince the American public that the war was unwinnable.<sup>lx</sup>

General Vo Nguyen Giap, the North Vietnamese Defense Minister, believed that a major offensive would trigger a popular uprising in the South. Hanoi labeled the plan 'the general offensive/general uprising' indicating that they clearly believed that civilians in the South would rally to their cause. Giap further proposed that the Tet Offensive take place during the next lunar New Year festival, some six months away. The six-month lead-time was due to the progress with which supplies could move south. Attacking during the Tet celebration might offend many Vietnamese, however, Giap believed the festival would provide the perfect cover. Furthermore, it had a historic precedent: in 1789, Vietnamese patriots had attacked the occupying Chinese in Hanoi during the lunar New Year Festival.<sup>lxi</sup>

To encourage the fighters in the South, the Communist Party used all its formidable propaganda powers. These are a few examples of the exhortation given by the Binh Dinh Province Committee to its trusted cadres:

The General Offensive will occur only once every 1,000 years.  
It will decide the fate of the country.  
It will end the war.  
It constitutes the wishes of both the party and the people.<sup>lxii</sup>

At secret bases inside South Vietnam and in adjacent, so-called neutral Laos and Cambodia, morale- building efforts proceeded. All these efforts were to rekindle Viet Cong spirits. After the rekindling the morale of his troops, General Giap was ready to proceed with the campaign.

General Giap conceived the 1968 Tet Offensive campaign to proceed in three phases. The first phase was scheduled to be executed from October –December of 1967. This phase consisted of medium sized coordinated fighting methods, battles up the mountainous spine of Vietnam. Phase two was scheduled for the period of January-March 1968. This phase was the Tet Offensive employing independent fighting methods. Phase three was to combine these two tactics and climax with a psychological capper, another Dien Bien Phu, code-named “Second Wave.”<sup>lxiii</sup> The third phase never materialized. Before proceeding with the details of the plan, the monograph's author deems it necessary to discuss coordinated fighting methods and independent fighting methods.

General Giap developed two armed *dau tranh* tactics that he labeled fighting methods. These fighting methods were designed to bypass the admitted advantage the Americans enjoyed in terms of mass (men and firepower) and movement (particularly the mobility provided by the helicopter). The coordinated fighting method was a medium-sized attack against a relatively important target, an enemy battalion headquarters, for instance. The essence of its success lies in its planning and execution. The target is destroyed with surgical precision, and the impact on the enemy is not military so much as psychological. The second tactic termed independent fighting method involves mounting dozens of daily small-scale actions, no single one being important but cumulatively raising the enemy's anxiety level and destroying his self-confidence. High casualties can be taken, and attacks need not be entirely victorious so long as they destroy the enemy's initiative.<sup>lxiv</sup>

The two fighting method discussions will aid in the assessment to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) planning and execution using two of Naveh's criteria. According to Naveh, the military plan should respond positively

to the following criteria: first, it must reflect the cognitive tension, transpiring from the polarization between the general orientation towards the strategic aim and the adherence to the tactical missions. Secondly, the planned action should be synergetic, i.e. throughout its entirety, represented by the initial aim; the system should yield a general product that is significantly greater than the linear arithmetic sum of its components' accomplishments. Moreover, in order to be regarded as operational, the matter must reflect the notion of synthesis, through the aspect of combined arms combat, amalgamation of the various forces and forms of warfare, and the integration of the various forces and formations within several geographical units and different dimensions of time.<sup>lxv</sup>

Phase one began in October 1967 using the coordinated fighting methods, the PAVN and Vietcong began engaging U.S. and South Vietnamese forces in a series of battles in the remote border regions of South Vietnam. They centered their assaults in the northern three military regions; the Communists gradually extended their activity into the MeKong Delta by year's end. In January PAVN positioned two divisions to threaten the U.S. Marine forces located at Khe Sanh, an outpost situated near the junction of the Laotian-North Vietnamese borders with South Vietnam. Khe Sanh had been occupied to defend against infiltration and to provide a jump-off point for possible operations into Laos. Responding to this threat, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) quickly diverted the 1st Cavalry Division and a brigade of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division to Thua Thien Province. This diversion of U.S. troops was an important element in shaping the battlespace for the Tet offensive. Although the border clashes caused heavy casualties among the PAVN forces, they persisted in their attacks. Communist losses, while substantial, served their overall strategic purpose.<sup>lxvi</sup> The battles at Khesanh and elsewhere in the hinterlands before and during the Tet offensive were intended to draw Americans away from the South Vietnam's population centers, thereby leaving them naked to assault.<sup>lxvii</sup>

On the eve of the Tet offensive, the communist added a diplomatic dimension to their plan. Until then, they had insisted, peace talks could not start before Americans met several conditions.

At a reception in Hanoi on December 30, 1967, Nguyen Duy Trinh, the North Vietnamese foreign minister, declared that the Communist “would” open discussions with the United States once the air strikes against North Vietnam were halted. This was, with variation, a repetition of the gesture made by Ho Chi Minh almost exactly fourteen years earlier, when he proposed negotiations to the French as both their armies braced for the showdown battle at Dienbienphu.<sup>lxviii</sup>

Phase two using the independent fighting method, hit in full force the night of 30-31 January. Employing 100, 000 troops PAVN and Viet Cong forces launched assaults on Saigon as well as thirty six of the forty-three provincial capitals, five of the six autonomous cities, and sixty-four of the two hundred and fort two district capitals. The Communists succeeded in penetrating fourteen of the major urban areas. In most instances allied forces quickly regained the upper hand and succeeded in driving PAVN and Viet Cong forces out within a few days. In Saigon, the process took somewhat longer, and in Hue, where the enemy committed eight battalions of regulars, the fighting was both protracted and bloody. The Communist offensive sputtered to an end on 11 February, two weeks after the initial assaults.<sup>lxix</sup>

The spectacular offensive caused two essential events back in America. First, it caused Walter Cronkite to make a shocking verdict to the American public. Up to the Tet Offensive, his views on the war had mostly been balanced and nearly bland. Now, on the evening of February 27, just back from Saigon, he rejected the official forecasts of victory, predicting instead that it seemed “more certain than ever that the bloody experience in Vietnam is to end in stalemate.”<sup>lxx</sup> The broadcast shocked and depressed Johnson, who assumed that Cronkite’s despondent comment would steer public opinion even farther away from support for the war. Secondly, it trapped Lyndon Johnson at a crucial juncture. His popularity had been dwindling for years, partly because of the war, but also because the electorate’s faith in his economic and social programs had faded. When he entered office in late 1963, eight out of ten Americans had liked his policies. By 1967, in contrast, only four out of ten citizens gave him a popular score. Then

came Tet, and his rating plummeted. During the six weeks following the Tet Offensive, public approval of his overall performance dropped from forty-eight percent to thirty-six percent. More dramatically, endorsement for his handling of the war fell from forty percent to twenty-six percent. The country's trust in Johnson's authority had evaporated. His credibility, the key to a president's capacity to govern, was gone. This caused Johnson to take himself out of the presidential race.<sup>lxxi</sup>

## **SECTION IV**

### **ASSESSMENT**

This section offers three different assessments. The first assessment is how the U.S. was an asymmetric threat to the PAVN and Vietcong. This assessment will be based of strategic asymmetry using the forms of asymmetry that are method, will, and patience. The second assessment is an assessment of the Tet Offensive to see if it contained some of the essential elements of campaign design. Some of the more common conceptual actions are to define the center of gravity, determine decisive points, select lines of operation, and understanding the dangers of paralysis commonly known as cybershock. The third is an assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) planning and execution using two of Naveh's criteria.

The first assessment is how the U.S. was an asymmetric threat to the PAVN and Vietcong. This assessment will be based on strategic asymmetry. The first form that will be discussed is method. The strategy the U.S developed for Vietnam was known as "gradualism". It was based on coercion of the enemy into acceptance of a compromise solution acceptable to both parties, but that accomplished American interests as well. This "diplomacy of violence" depended on enough



power to coerce without being so powerful as to cause escalation to nuclear, or even a general non-nuclear war with either China or the Soviet Union. Under this theory, the United States had the ability to stabilize a crisis at any time, simply by controlling the level of violence being applied.<sup>lxxii</sup> However, General Westmoreland clearly committed U.S. forces into a primarily a conventional, big-unit war.

Westmoreland's strategy for the use of American ground forces was based on large-scale conventional war, not on limited war fought for a negotiated settlement.<sup>lxxiii</sup> In pursuit of conventional military victory in Vietnam, Westmoreland developed an attrition strategy, which relied on the tremendous American firepower advantage of airpower and artillery to produce a loss ratio acceptable to the America but unacceptable to the North Vietnamese.<sup>lxxiv</sup> Without national commitment to the war and without tangible military success, President Johnson was unwilling to force this strategy on the American people and Congress. Westmoreland's chosen strategy of attrition was too costly for America in a limited war. America was in a limited war while North Vietnam was in a total war.

The U.S. was relying on a big confrontation with another large force where decisive victory could be achieved with superior technology. With the deployment of American troops to South Vietnam in large numbers, the Army applied the doctrine and force structure it developed for conventional contingencies in Europe and Korea against insurgent forces practicing a form of revolutionary warfare.<sup>lxxv</sup> The method that both opponents selected to fight the war is what caused the U.S. to be asymmetric to the PAVN and Vietcong. Understanding the difference in the type of conflict is important because it effects the means and ways in which to achieve the strategic endstate. The U.S. was in an unconventional war.

JCS Pub 1-02, defines unconventional warfare as:

A broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of long duration, predominately conducted by indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source. It includes guerilla warfare and other direct offensive, low

visibility, covert, or clandestine operations, as well as indirect activities, and evasion and escape.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

In one sense, there are always asymmetries between forces. Differing circumstances lead to differing military structures. Asymmetry becomes decisive when the degree of dissimilarity equates to an exploitable advantage. Asymmetry may decay over time as adversaries adapt to the dissimilarities exposed in action.<sup>lxxvii</sup> The U.S. military was engaged in an unconventional war where the enemy's will to win was greater than America's.

Ho Chi Minh, emphasizing that the laborer and farmer were as important as the war fighter in winning the war, continually stressed the role of people as "North Vietnam's foremost weapon of war."<sup>lxxviii</sup> Men, women, and children were valued equally as a resource and played a vital role. General Giap confirmed and reinforced this approach following the war in a conversation with Stanley Karnow.

We were waging a peoples' war, *a la maniere vietnamienne*-a total war in which every man, every woman, every unit, big or small, is sustained by a mobilized population. So America's sophisticated weapons, electronic devices and the rest were to no avail, despite its military power. America misgauged the limits of its power. In war, there are two factors-human beings and weapons. Ultimately, though human beings are the decisive factor, Human beings!<sup>lxxix</sup>

The North Vietnamese understood that they were in a total war for their survival as a nation. The Americans, on the other hand, were in a limited war. The people of America, in general, did not feel that this conflict was for their national survival. The President refused to mobilize the reserves and hence the will of America was at a different level than the North Vietnamese.

In dealing with Vietnam, President Johnson ran head-on into what is now so widely seen as reality of world politics that it now ranks as conventional wisdom: Guerilla insurgencies with significant indigenous and external support are extremely difficult to defeat with conventional armaments and forces. Johnson constantly struggled with the issue concerning the proper application of the United States' containment policies in the world. The President believed that United States could and should fight to preserve South Vietnam from communism.

In the end, Johnson's decisions were shaped by his views of the United States' role in the world. The linkage of Vietnam to larger issues of containment, credibility and the Cold War is very clear and acknowledged by nearly all critics of the war.<sup>lxxx</sup>

The third form of asymmetry is patience. The U.S. tendency in Vietnam was to depend on superior firepower and technology rather than on professional skill and soldierly qualities. Strategists continually searched for, but never found, the technical "silver bullet" solution that would end the war quickly and with dramatic results. Decisive battle, the goal of the conventional force was often negated.<sup>lxxxi</sup> However, the North Vietnamese recognized the conflict as a protracted struggle, powered by an enormous confidence in the certainty of ultimate victory and the justness of their cause. It was also characterized by an equivalent amount of patience. Despite all their setbacks, betrayals and disappointments, the North Vietnamese never gave up. They saw their revolution as a process, a series of stages.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

The first assessment demonstrated how the U.S. was a strategic asymmetric threat to the PAVN and Vietcong. The strategy of the U.S. was one of gradualism, which Westmoreland never fully understood or appreciated. Westmoreland was relying on a big confrontation with another large force where decisive victory could be achieved with superior technology. With the deployment of American troops to South Vietnam in large numbers, the Army applied the doctrine and force structure it developed for conventional contingencies in Europe and Korea against insurgent forces practicing a form of revolutionary warfare. The method that both opponents selected to fight the war is what caused the U.S. to be asymmetric to the PAVN and Vietcong.

The second assessment is an assessment of the Tet Offensive to see if it contained some of the essential elements of campaign design. Some of the more common conceptual actions used for this assessment are to define the center of gravity, select lines of operation, determine decisive

points, and understanding the dangers of paralysis commonly known as cybershock. If some of the more common conceptual actions are present within the 1968 Tet Offensive, there is the possibility that operational art was demonstrated. The academic definition of operational art has been the subject of much scrutiny and discussion.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> It may be useful, however, to point out that the utility of this concept, relevant to preparing an operation, lies not in the academic but the effective definition of the term. The value lies in the product. An example of an effective definition is to see the enemy as a system and the center of gravity as the focal node that ties all the enemy's subsystems together into an integrated whole. The purpose of center of gravity analysis is to identify this central, essential function, and design a campaign to destroy, neutralize, control or simply affect this function.

The North Vietnamese understood that the center of gravity to achieve the political purpose was the people. General Vo Nguyen Giap, the North Vietnamese Defense Minister, believed that a major offensive would trigger a popular uprising in the South. Hanoi labeled the plan 'the general offensive/general uprising' indicating that they clearly believed that civilians in the South would rally to their cause. However, General Giap also realized that the people back in the U.S. were important also. The people back in America were Giap's means to convince the American public that the war was unwinnable.

Clausewitz's concept of paradoxical trinity is relevant because the trinity helps to conceptually understand the center of gravity as the focal node that ties all of the enemy's subsystems together into an integrated whole. The trinity was formed of primordial violence, hatred, chance and reason. These aspects mainly concern the people, military and government respectively. The three elements are mutually dependent of one another yet their interaction concerning the effect of military matters must be considered. General Giap understood the trinity to its full implications. General Giap focused on the political aim (the reason) but without ignoring either the role of chance (military) or the effect of passion (people) with the design of the campaign. General Giap used military force thinking he understood what the effect would be

on passion (people). Although the passion was miscalculated with the people in the South, chance (military) was instrumental in igniting the passion of the people in America. The method and timing of achieving the effect desired on the center of gravity must support the strategic objectives of the conflict. The effect desired may not drive the enemy to capitulate. The campaign may be successful and the enemy chooses to fight on anyway. That choice is always in the hands of the enemy; it is not controlled by friendly actions. This search for the center of gravity must not be confused with the identification of decisive points. The search for center of gravity is more holistic and inclusive. It requires an examination of the enemy system as a unit, and the interrelationship of the system components, to identify this “hub of all power and movement.”<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Decisive points are narrower in scope and function, often serving as critical nodes for one element and subsystem within the enemy’s overall system.

The second conceptual action for campaign design is the identification of decisive points. Operational art consists in part of selecting from all possible decisive points that will overcome the enemy’s center of gravity. Decisive points shape operational design and allow commanders to select objectives that are clearly defined, decisive, and attainable.<sup>lxxxv</sup>

Before discussing the North Vietnamese decisive points, a review of the tactics used is essential to understand the argument. The tactic used during the main assault of the Tet Offensive was termed independent fighting method. This method involves mounting dozens of daily small-scale actions, no single one being important but cumulatively raising the enemy’s anxiety level and destroying his self-confidence. High casualties can be taken, and attacks need not be entirely victorious so long as they destroy the enemy’s initiative.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

The definition of decisive point and the objective chosen suggest that the decisive points were possibly Saigon, Hue, and potentially the other urban areas. However, the author suggests that America’s resolve was the decisive point. The American forces were the enabling system that allowed the South Vietnamese government to maintain control over the people. Before the

uprising could occur, the American forces had to be destroyed or pulled out. Decisive points are not centers of gravity; they are keys to attacking or protecting it. In the Tet Offensive case study, the decisive point was the enabler that prevented the North Vietnamese from achieving the desired effect on the center of gravity or people. The urban areas were not essential to control or maintain they simply were the ways in which to attack the American forces and potentially gain support from the local populace.

The third conceptual action for campaign design is to select lines of operation.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

An operation may have single or multiple lines of operation. A single line of operation concentrates forces and simplifies planning. This was the main theme behind North Vietnamese concept for lines of operation. Understanding that an effective logistics system was a key to operational success, Hanoi's first priority was to provide a secure means of infiltrating manpower and material into South Vietnam. The Ho Chi Minh trail was this secure means. Significant improvement to the trail started in 1964 when Hanoi realized that the conventional phase of the war was coming. The decision was made to transform the Ho Chi Minh Trail into a mature logistical infrastructure.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> The transition to conventional warfare required a logistical system capable of transporting hundreds of thousands of tons of weapons, ammunition, food and personnel into the south. The architect of the trail, Colonel Dong Si Nguyen, spared no expense in constructing the modern trail. He dug underground barracks, hospitals, workshops, storage facilities and fuel depots as a precaution against air raids. By 1966, sufficient improvements had been made to the trail to introduce trucks as a mode of transportation, but the trip was still arduous and slow, taking one month to transit.

Secure Lines of Communication were an essential component to operational success to reunify Vietnam. The secure LOC drove the operational tempo of the war, with the Trail providing the logistics lifeline supporting the revolution. The Trail enabled North Vietnam to impose its will whenever and wherever they chose, taking the battle deep into South Vietnam, and also providing base areas and sanctuaries.

One last topic related to essential elements of campaign design is the dangers of paralysis commonly known as cybershock. The concept of cybershock included five forms of paralysis according to Dr. James Schneider. The 1968 Tet Offensive demonstrates three out of the five forms of paralysis. The first form of paralysis was denying the enemy comprehensive information he needs through operational security, deception, and psychological operations. The second form is the shock caused by surprise induces a broad sense of panic, and lastly, the high tempo of the friendly forces imparts a cybernetic daze in the enemy. The enemy nervous system is overloaded, and the enemy is confused, finally reduced to subordinate units and then into disarray.

Operational security was crucial for the Tet Offensive. The Communist practice of compartmentalizing planning paid dividends. Since the plan mentioned only the immediate activities of the units involved, American intelligence officers failed to foresee that they were part of a nation-wide plan. Consequently, countermeasures were left to local commanders.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

The majority of the local commanders did not take the appropriate countermeasures required and were concentrating on the cease- fire. This was one of the prerequisites for deception operations. Communist planners had timed the offensive for a holiday period when the South Vietnamese and Americans would be less vigilant.<sup>xc</sup> However, the most significant deception operation centered on Hanoi's effort to conceal the strategic and operational significance of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Hanoi denounced the trail as fiction and myth, thus reinforcing an early trail slogan: "Absolute secrecy, absolute security."<sup>xcii</sup> The deception campaign was so successful that the U.S. initially failed to realize the vital role the Trail played in supporting military strategies. The U.S. was aware of the Trail's existence, but did not fully comprehend its operational significance, nor recognizes the extent of improvements. By the time recognition dawned, the trail infrastructure was mature enough that the U.S. was unsuccessful in halting the flow of men and material except for very brief periods.

The main psychological effort for the Tet Offensive was through diplomatic efforts. At a reception in Hanoi on December 30, 1967, Nguyen Duy Trinh, the North Vietnamese foreign minister, declared that the Communist “would” open discussions with the United States once the air strikes against North Vietnam were halted. Conveniently, it was also at a critical time in the United States. It was just before the presidential primaries and thus, “caught the American political system at its moment of greatest irresolution and potential for change.” This was, with variation, a repetition of the gesture made by Ho Chi Minh almost exactly fourteen years earlier, when he proposed negotiations to the French as both their armies braced for the showdown battle at Dienbienphu.<sup>xcii</sup>

Shock and tempo the second and third form of paralysis will be discussed together because they are invariable linked in this case study. They are linked because tempo is a factor contributing to surprise and surprise is essential for shock.<sup>xciii</sup> The second form is the shock caused by surprise induces a broad sense of panic, and lastly, the high tempo of the friendly forces imparts a cybernetic daze in the enemy. The enemy nervous system is overloaded, and the enemy is confused, finally reduced to independently acting subordinate units and then into disarray.

Surprise was a very important factor for the Tet Offensive. In many cases, it has a decisive effect upon the success or failure of a battle or campaign. This is the art of catching the enemy by surprise as to the direction, targets, and time of the attack, the forces fielded and the forms of combat used. From one battle to another, surprise must be created in the most varied ways in order to cause repeated and bigger surprises to the enemy. The greatest surprise for the Americans was the timing of the offensive. This is one of the essential points, which made the U.S. completely passive strategically.

Throughout the offensive, the U.S. suffered one surprise after another. They were surprised by the direction and targets of the attacks as in the Central Highland, by the method of combat as



in Hue, or by the timing of the attack as in Da Nang; in Saigon the Americans and South Vietnamese were surprised by both the timing and scale of the attack. General Giap states:

Making skillful use of the surprise factor, repeatedly taking the enemy by surprise throughout the offensive is a most important condition to push forward our attack favorably and completely defeat the enemy.<sup>xciv</sup>

Surprise induces a broad sense of panic, and lastly, the high tempo of the friendly forces imparts a cybernetic daze in the enemy. The enemy nervous system is overloaded, and the enemy is confused, finally reduced to subordinate units and then into disarray. This did happen initially during the Tet Offensive, however surprise is a temporary combat multiplier and overwhelming combat power eventually overcame the element of surprise.

The second assessment demonstrated that the Tet Offensive contained some of the essential elements of campaign design. Some of the more common conceptual actions used for this assessment were to define the center of gravity, select lines of operation, determine decisive points, and understanding the dangers of paralysis commonly known as cybershock. If some of the more common conceptual actions are present within the 1968 Tet Offensive, there is the potential argument that operational art was demonstrated.

The third assessment demonstrates the effectiveness and efficiency of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) planning and execution using two of Naveh's criteria. According to Naveh, the military plan should respond positively to the following criteria: first, it must reflect the cognitive tension, transpiring from the polarization between the general orientation towards the strategic aim and the adherence to the tactical missions. Secondly, the planned action should be synergetic, i.e. throughout its entirety, represented by the initial aim; the system should yield a general product that is significantly greater than the linear arithmetic sum of its components' accomplishments. Moreover, in order to be regarded as operational, the matter must reflect the notion of synthesis, through the aspect of combined arms combat, amalgamation of the various

forces and forms of warfare, and the integration of the various forces and formations within several geographical units and different dimensions of time.<sup>xcv</sup>

First, the author must determine if the Tet Offensive reflected the cognitive tension, transpiring from the polarization between the general orientation towards the strategic aim and the adherence to the tactical missions. The strategic aim for the 1968 Tet Offensive was to effect a withdrawal of American forces from South Vietnam to bring about negotiations leading to a new; Communist dominated government in the south. According to Naveh, the aim serves as the “cognitive propulsion” to the maneuver for both opponents. However, both opponents try to disrupt the others operation. Naveh points out that the disruption can only be negotiated through the dynamic method of synchronization.<sup>xcvi</sup>

The cognitive tension provides the element, which synchronizes the succession of random encounters along the entire battlefield and the preconceived operational effect. In other words, the intellectual capacity of the commanders of the friendly system to interpret a relevant tactical situation according to the abstract terms of the operational aim. Did General Giap devise a concrete dynamic solution promoting its accomplishment?

Yes, General Giap did devise a concrete dynamic solution. General Giap conceived the 1968 Tet Offensive campaign to proceed in three phases. The tactics were to derail the fledgling pacification effort. Attacking the urban areas in an attrition strategy, that focused on whittling away America’s will to continue the war did this. Furthermore, demonstrating to the South Vietnamese who lived in the urban areas that they were not safe from insurgent retribution.<sup>xcvii</sup>

Secondly, the author needs to determine if the planned action was synergetic, i.e. throughout its entirety, represented by the initial aim; the system should yield a general product that is significantly greater than the linear arithmetic sum of its components’ accomplishments. Moreover, in order to be regarded as operational, the matter must reflect the notion of synthesis, through the aspect of combined arms combat, amalgamation of the various forces and forms of

warfare, and the integration of the various forces and formations within several geographical units and different dimensions of time.

The way in which General Giap accomplished the synergetic action was by developing two armed dau tranh tactics that he labeled fighting methods. These fighting methods were designed to bypass the admitted advantage the Americans enjoyed in terms of mass (men and firepower) and movement (particularly the mobility provided by the helicopter). Both fighting methods depended on an aggregation of effects that led to the next phase or final objective.

The campaign strategy reflected the notion of synthesis, through the aspect of combined arms combat, amalgamation of the various forces and forms of warfare, and the integration of the various forces and formations within several geographical units and different dimensions of time. Mao and Giap consider political dau tranh and armed dau tranh as the jaws of the pincers used to attack the enemy. The pincers of dau tranh close on the enemy. They represent the complete strategy. All actions taken in war including military attack or guerrilla ambush, propaganda broadcast or official statement at the conference table, every mission abroad, every decision taken from the Party cell in the village to the Politburo in Hanoi, come within the scope and framework of the two dau tranhs.<sup>xcviii</sup>

The third assessment demonstrated the effectiveness and efficiency of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) planning and execution using two of Naveh's criteria. The plan responded positively to the following criteria: first, it reflected the cognitive tension, transpiring from the polarization between the general orientation towards the strategic aim and the adherence to the tactical missions. Secondly, the planned action was synergetic, i.e. throughout its entirety, represented by the initial aim; the system yielded a general product that is significantly greater than the linear arithmetic sum of its components' accomplishments. Moreover, in order to be regarded as operational, the matter reflected the notion of synthesis, through the aspect of combined arms combat, amalgamation of the various forces and forms of warfare, and the

integration of the various forces and formations within several geographical units and different dimensions of time.<sup>xcix</sup>

The monograph offered three different assessments. The first assessment was how the U.S. was an asymmetric threat to the PAVN and Vietcong. This assessment was based of strategic asymmetry using the forms of asymmetry that are method, will, and patience. The method that both opponents selected to fight the war is what caused the U.S. to be asymmetric to the PAVN and Vietcong. The second assessment was an assessment of the Tet Offensive to see if it contained some of the essential elements of campaign design. The Tet Offensive did contain some of the more common conceptual actions which were to define the center of gravity, determine decisive points, select lines of operation, and understanding the dangers of paralysis commonly known as cybershock. The third assessment was of the effectiveness and efficiency of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) planning and execution using Naveh's criteria. The North Vietnamese's plan responded positively to the following criteria: first, it reflected the cognitive tension, transpiring from the polarization between the general orientation towards the strategic aim and the adherence to the tactical missions. Secondly, the planned action was synergetic.

### **Lessons For Future U.S. Initial Campaigns**

Success for military planning includes military planners who understand the goals of their government. Military planners must understand that they cannot base all their plans on a battlefield victory to be achieved by force of arms. The North Vietnamese understood this, and in their planning combined military, political and diplomatic in their strategy to defeat their opponent. However, if a precise statement is not given to the military officer responsible for operational planning and execution, he must do everything in his power to define such a statement, and then gain approval from the governmental leaders. Military action taken without a

clear statement of strategic ends is guaranteed to cause serious problems for both the military executor and the political decision-maker. The North Vietnamese's military action was taken with a clear statement of strategic ends.

General Giap and the planners understood the strategic endstate. The endstate for the 1968 Tet Offensive was to effect a withdrawal of American forces from South Vietnam to bring about negotiations leading to a new; Communist dominated government in the south. To achieve this endstate, the National Liberation Front fought on three fronts: political, military and diplomatic. The political battle involved mobilizing support from the people of South Vietnam while undermining the South Vietnamese government. The military component required a confrontation with the U.S. and their allies on the battlefield to inflict losses. The battlefield had no objectives that were essential to retain. The diplomatic element of the three-prong strategy focused on mobilizing international opposition to the American war effort and promoting anti-war sentiment in the United States. In general terms, Communist strategists followed Mao Tse-Tung's principles of guerilla war. However, the Vietnamese Communists adapted strategies that leveraged the vulnerabilities in their opponent's strategy.

A lesson from the campaign planning of the 1968 Tet Offensive is the need to develop a doctrine, and appropriate force structure and training base, for whatever type of warfare the political leaders believe is necessary. Since 1994, peace operations are one of the essential tasks given to the military by the political leadership. Although new doctrine is being written, there appears to be a general attitude that conventional forces, with conventional equipment and training, can effectively conduct peace operations.<sup>c</sup> The case study demonstrated the effective use of different types of forces combined with their non-military forces for an effective strategy.

The U.S. tendency in Vietnam was to depend on superior firepower and technology rather than on professional skill and soldierly qualities. Strategists continually searched for the technical solution that would end the war quickly and with dramatic results. North Vietnam's ingenuity and low-tech solutions, combined with the terrain of Vietnam, effectively blunted the

impact of the U.S technology and mobility. We have learned that the massive applications of force and high technology solutions are not always appropriate at the strategic and operational level.

## **SECTION V**

### **CONCLUSION**

This monograph investigated whether operational art was useful against an asymmetrical threat. The author's methodology assessed if the theory of operational art applied to a force confronting an asymmetric threat. Does operational art, an operational concept developed as an analytical tool for symmetrical warfare have utility against an asymmetrical threat? In the 1968 Tet Offensive case study, the asymmetric threat was us, The United States of America. This question was answered by analyzing the effectiveness of operational campaign design of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN).

The effectiveness and efficiency of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) planning and execution was evaluated using Naveh's criteria. The North Vietnamese's plan responded positively to the following criteria: first, it reflected the cognitive tension, transpiring from the polarization between the general orientation towards the strategic aim and the adherence to the tactical missions. Secondly, the planned action was synergetic.

The Vietnam War was a political and military strategic success for the North Vietnamese. Coordination between the political and military leadership insured the linkage of strategic ends with military means and ways. With the linkage between the political and military strategies, contrasted with the absence of such linkage on the U.S. side, the North Vietnamese struggle was destined for success. In the 1968 Tet Offensive case study, the North Vietnamese exploited asymmetries by creating their own asymmetries depending on the enemy's posture and situation. They combined the methods of three kinds of armed forces, combining big, medium and small

sized attacks. In particular, they launched closely coordinated operations and campaigns of strategic significance with a view of attaining a single strategic aim.

Dr. Schneider's distributed enemy attribute implied the necessity of facing a similarly designed opponent in order to achieve operational success. If this is so, does the lack of a similarly designed opponent negate the importance of operational art? The monograph's author believes the answer to be no. The attribute bends, but it does not break. The opponent still exists and requires greater imagination and different techniques to engage fully. Conflict must be accepted as it comes to us, because of its interactive nature. Regardless of the form of conflict one is faced with, it is imperative to be able to adapt to conflict's very complex nature quickly. Operational art needs to be fully applied to asymmetric threats.

Sir Michael Howard was correct in identifying that the advantage goes to the side, which can most quickly adjust itself to the new and unfamiliar environment and learn from its mistakes. It is this flexibility both in the minds of the Armed Forces and their organization that needs above all to be developed. Finding and creating vulnerabilities and attacking those vulnerabilities with inherent strengths is the key to asymmetric warfare.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> Vo Nguyen Giap, *How We Won The War*, (Philadelphia, PA: RECON Publications, 1976), 24. General Giap is the architect of the Vietnamese military strategy. For thirty years before the spring 1975 liberation of South Vietnam, General Giap was the key organizer of the Vietnamese armed forces and the main strategic thinker. General Giap was a member of the political bureau of the Vietnam Workers' party and vice-premier and minister of defense of the Democratic republic of Vietnam.

<sup>ii</sup> U.S. Army, *FM 101-5-1, Operational Terms and Graphics*. (Washington: Department of the Army, September 1997), 1-114.

<sup>iii</sup> Shimon Naveh. *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory*, (London, Great Britain: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997) 13.

<sup>iv</sup> Steven P. Goligowski, *Operational Art and Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain*, (Unpublished monograph, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Advanced Military Studies Program, School of Advanced Military Studies, 1994) p.3.

<sup>v</sup> Michael Howard. *Military Science in an Age of Peace*, Chesney Memorial Gold Medal Lecture, 3 October 1973. Reprinted by the School of Advanced Military Studies, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, April 1983. P.3.

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vii</sup> Steven Metz and Douglas V. Johnson II, *ASYMMETRY AND U.S. MILITARY STRATEGY: Definition, Background, and Strategic Concepts*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2001), 1. The following is the DOD definition of asymmetric warfare, established by the Joint Staff: "attempts to circumvent or undermine an opponent's strengths while exploiting his weaknesses using methods that differ significantly from the opponent's usual mode of operations." The CIA defines asymmetric warfare as the use of innovative strategies, tactics, and technologies by a 'weaker' state or sub-state adversary that are intended to avoid the strengths and exploit the potential vulnerabilities of larger and technologically superior opponents. This includes the selective uses of weapons or military resources by a state or sub-state group to counter, deter, or possibly defeat a numerically or technologically superior force and the use of diplomatic and other non-military resources or tactics by a state or sub-state group to discourage or constrain military operations by a superior force. The three themes in DOD and CIA views of asymmetric warfare include pitting one's strengths against selected enemy weaknesses, using unexpected, unconventional, or innovative methods of attack or defense and asymmetric threats can be either technologically or culturally based.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

<sup>ix</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, "On Protracted War," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol. II, (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 172.

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<sup>x</sup>Steven Metz and Douglas V. JohnsonII, 8-10. The Mongols, Assyrians, Aztecs, and Zulus are examples.

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid. The six forms of asymmetry include method, technology, will, organization, and patience. Although an argument can be made that all six fit the 1968 Tet Offensive case study, the author choose the three that were considered the most prominent factors in the conclusion of the conflict.

<sup>xii</sup> Metz and Johnson II, 10.

<sup>xiii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>xv</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, "On Protracted War," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol. II, (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 219.

<sup>xvi</sup> Department of the Army, *FM 3-0, Operations (DRAG Edition)*, (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2000), 4-33. To reduce the vulnerability to asymmetric attacks and to minimize their effects, Army organizations, training, and equipment emphasize flexible employment in diverse situations. Protective measures such as physical security and OPSEC lessen the effects of asymmetry.

<sup>xvii</sup> Michael R. Matheny, *The Development of the Theory and Doctrine of Operational Art in the American Army, 1920-1940*. (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, 1989) 4-5.

<sup>xviii</sup> Peter J. Schifferle, *The Ia Drang Campaign 1965: A Successful Operational Campaign or Mere Tactical Failure?* (Unpublished monograph, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Advanced Military Studies Program, School of Advanced Military Studies, 1994), 4.

<sup>xix</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. By Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton, NJ: University of Princeton Press, 1976), 177.

<sup>xx</sup> No one can say for sure, but a logical reason for why Clausewitz never discusses the practical art of formulating a campaign plan is that *On War* is not a finished work.

<sup>xxi</sup> Clausewitz. 595, 619.

<sup>xxii</sup> Ibid. 89.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Ibid.528.

<sup>xxv</sup> Matheny, 6.

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<sup>xxvi</sup> Matheny, 5. An Englishman Henry Lloyd first wrote of the importance of the line of operations in 1781. Heinrich V. Bulow wrote about the necessity of a base of operations in 1799. Freitag-Loringhoven, *Generalship*, 12,15.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Baron de Jomini, *The Art of War*, trans. By CPT G.H. Mendell and LT W.P. Craighill, (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott, 1862), 230.

<sup>xxviii</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

<sup>xxix</sup> Dr. James J. Schneider, *Theoretical Paper No.4 Vulcan's Anvil: The American Civil War and the Emergence of Operational Art*, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, 16 June 1991), 18. And Bruce W. Menning, "Operational Art's Origins." *Military Review*, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: September-October 1997), 24-27. Several Soviet 1920 and 1930 theorists credited with furthering the evolution of operational art include A.A. Svechin, V.K. Triandafillov, M.N. Tukhachevsky and G.S. Isserson. Most of these theorists studied at the General Staff Academy on the translated works of Schlichting, Clausewitz and Moltke, among others. Working without the limitations of an entrenched bureaucracy, which was swept away by World War I and the Russian Revolution, these theorists advanced ideas that form operational art's foundation. Svechin implied a new level of warfare by claiming that operations link strategy and tactics. Tukhachevsky asserted the significance of deep operations. Several Isserson advanced his aggregation theory, whereby operational art served to re-aggregate the effects of military forces.

<sup>xxx</sup> Dr. James J. Schneider, "Cybershock: Cybernetic Paralysis as a New Form of Warfare" *Military Theory Readings*. (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, 1995) 2-9.

<sup>xxxi</sup> *Ibid*, 2-9.

<sup>xxxii</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Dr. James J. Schneider, *Theoretical Paper No.4 Vulcan's Anvil: The American Civil War and the Emergence of Operational Art*, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, 16 June 1991), 32.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> The author has chosen only this attribute because the distributed enemy attribute implies the necessity of facing a similarly designed opponent in order to achieve operational success. This attribute goes against the author's hypothesis. The goal of operational art is to shape the environment as to time, place, and resources in order to stack the odds in favor of the tactical commander, to accomplish strategic goals. It appears that countering an asymmetric threat requires the most efficient use of limited resources to accomplish the strategic objective.

<sup>xxxv</sup> *Ibid*. 38-67. Schneider offered eight distinctive attributes and definitions inherent to operational art as follows: **Distributed Operation:** An ensemble of deep maneuvers and distributed battles extended in space and time but unified by a common aim. **Distributed Campaign:** The final structure built by the operational artist and characterized by the integration of several simultaneous and successive distributed operations. **Continuous Logistics:** Concerned with the movement and sustainment of armies in the field. Continuous

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logistics maintains both the movement tempo and the army's force density. **Instantaneous C2:** Distributed deployment of forces creates a greater variety of unexpected or unanticipated tactical and operational possibilities, necessitating enhanced C2. **Operationally Durable Formation:** A formation capable of conducting indefinitely a succession of distributed operations; a byproduct of continuous logistics and C2. **Operational Vision:** Associated with mental agility, operational vision is the ability to react to incoming information faster than it arrives; to see the whole view of the war. **Distributed Enemy:** An operationally durable formation operates most effectively against a similarly designed opponent. If there is nothing to strike, the operational artist may have trouble describing a way to link tactical means to strategic ends. **Distributed Deployment:** Ties together a nation's ability to generate and field an army. Includes production capacity, working population, natural resources, infrastructure and mobilization procedures.

xxxvi Schifferle, 2.

xxxvii Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam*, (Baltimore Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 238.

xxxviii Roger Sweringen and Hammond Rolph, *Communism in Vietnam*. (United States of America: The American Bar Association, 1967), 35-37.

xxxix Ibid.

xl Ibid, 3.

xli James R. Arnold, *TET OFFENSIVE 1968: Turning Point in Vietnam*. (London England: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 1990), 6.

xlili Douglas E. Pike, *PAVN: Peoples Army of Vietnam*. (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1986), 216-230.

xliv Ibid.

xlv Ibid, 216.

xlv Ibid.

xlvi Ibid, 220.

xlvii Ibid.

xlviii Ibid, 222.

lix Ibid.

<sup>1</sup> Arnold, 6.

<sup>li</sup> Pike, 222.



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<sup>lii</sup> Ibid, 219.

<sup>liii</sup> Ibid, 220.

<sup>liv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lv</sup> Ibid, 240. The Vietnamese communist realized that it might be possible to achieve a change of war venue and determine its outcome away from the battlefield.

<sup>lvi</sup> Ibid, 244. Again, communicational means were used to undermine the South Vietnam armed forces and governmental structures. The techniques included the enunciation and practice of a lenient policy towards captured ARVN officers and officials; an intense and intimidate war of nerves against elite ARVN units such as Rangers or Paratroopers, or against key civilian officials such as village chiefs and district security officers.

<sup>lvii</sup> Ibid, 245. The objectives of the dan van program were threefold: First, organizational, throwing a net of organizations over the villager, enmeshing him in the system; also to oppose, frustrate, and nullify the various internal security measures taken by the South Vietnam government and the efforts of its agents to penetrate the liberated area. Second, recruitment, enlisting the populace into civilian organizations and of course into the PLAF. Much of the recruiting was to cover labor to build internal defense structures known as combat hamlets, which, it was hoped, with the aid of local guerrilla or PAVN units, could fend off or discourage ARVN military operations. Third, financial, raising of funds through taxes, the so-called Viet Cong War Bonds; or direct collection that was extortion in everything but name.

<sup>lviii</sup> Arnold, 6.

<sup>lix</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>lx</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lxi</sup> Ibid, 12. General Giap understood that six months was essential for the major offensive to be successful. Understanding that an effective logistics system was the key to operational success, Hanoi's first priority was to secure means of infiltrating manpower and material into South Vietnam. Hanoi used three Lines of Communication (LOC). Two were Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC). Infiltration by small boats into ports along the coast of Vietnam, principally through Haiphong harbor, and via ocean going vessels into Sihanoukville, Cambodia. The third LOC is the land route known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. These same three LOCs were the same lines of communication to help spread the propaganda messages needed to cause the general uprising.

<sup>lxii</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>lxiii</sup> Pike, 232, n8.

<sup>lxiv</sup> Ibid, 226.

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<sup>lxv</sup> Naveh, 13.

<sup>lxvi</sup> Krepinevich, 238.

<sup>lxvii</sup> Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1982), 542.

<sup>lxviii</sup> *Ibid*, 539.

<sup>lxix</sup> Krepinevich, 239.

<sup>lxx</sup> Karnow, 542.

<sup>lxxi</sup> *Ibid*, 546.

<sup>lxxii</sup> Schifferle, 9. LTC Schifferle's references for this idea include Wendell John Coates, Jr., "Malingering McNamara Model for the Use of U.S. Military Force," *Strategic Review* 17 (Fall 1989) 19. For an analysis of the various limited war theorists, see the scholarly monograph by Michael W. Cannon, "The Development of the American Theory of Limited War, 1954-1963," US Army Advanced Military Studies Program, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Term II, Academic year 1988-1989.

<sup>lxxiii</sup> Westmoreland's strategy was based off existing contingency plans (CONPLANS and OPLANS) from MACV and PACOM. He used these OPLANS for his planning until the July decision not to call up the Reserves. This decision forced MACV to rewrite all plans, since the Reserve call-up was essential to the logistical apparatus for the OPLANS.

<sup>lxxiv</sup> Schifferle, 31.

<sup>lxxv</sup> Krepinevich, 270.

<sup>lxxvi</sup> US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. (Washington DC: March 23, 1994), 399. This manual is currently under revision, due out 2001.

<sup>lxxvii</sup> Department of the Army, *FM 3-0, Operations (DRAG Edition)*, (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2000), 4-33.

<sup>lxxviii</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, 279.

<sup>lxxix</sup> Karnow, 20-21.

<sup>lxxx</sup> David M. Barrett, *Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and his Vietnam Advisors*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press Kansas, 1993) 194. See George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979) 115; *Two Vietnams: A Political and Military Analysis*, (New York: Praeger, 1967) 407.

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<sup>lxxx</sup> John D. Waghelstein, *Preparing for the Wrong War*, (Ann Arbor, MI: U.M.I, 1990) 4. This is demonstrated by plans THAYER and PERSHING executed by the 1st Cavalry Division reinforced with a brigade of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry division, in February 1967. The mission of the two plans was to fully pacify the Binh Dinh Province in three months. Both plans opened with extensive search and destroy operations that failed to locate the fleeing enemy once contact was lost. These operations continued until 19 March. Both operations were termed a success by the Army, although the division would have preferred a realignment of the rules of engagement to permit unit commanders to authorize reconnaissance by fire on suspected areas of enemy activity. All of this was done in an area that the Army had characterized as densely populated. In trying to achieve quick results, the Army waged counterinsurgency on the cheap. Since the Army viewed the conflict through the lens of conventional conflict with big units, the result was an indecisive victory.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Giap, 18.

<sup>lxxxiii</sup> *Drag FM 3-0* discusses the concept of center of gravity. Centers of gravity are those characteristics, capabilities, or locations from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight. Destruction or neutralization of the enemy center of gravity is the most direct path to victory. Commanders examine many approaches, direct and indirect, to an enemy's center of gravity.

<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Clausewitz, 177.

<sup>lxxxv</sup> *Drag FM 3-0* describes decisive point as: A decisive point is a geographic place, specific key event, or enabling system that allows commanders to gain a marked advantage over an enemy and greatly influence the outcome of the attack. Decisive points are not centers of gravity; they are keys to attacking or protecting it. Normally, a situation presents more decisive points than the force can control, destroy, or neutralize with available resources.

<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Krepinevich, 239. During phase two, employing 100,000 troops PAVN and Viet Cong forces launched assaults on Saigon as well as thirty six of the forty-three provincial capitals, five of the six autonomous cities, and sixty-four of the two hundred and forty two district capitals. The Communists succeeded in penetrating fourteen of the major urban areas. In Saigon, the process took somewhat longer, and in Hue, where the North Vietnamese committed eight battalions of regulars, the fighting was both protracted and bloody.

<sup>lxxxvii</sup> *Drag FM 3-0* describes lines of operation as: Lines of operations define the directional orientation of the force in time and space in relation to the enemy. They connect the force with its base of operations and its objectives.

<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Karnow, 674. General Tran Van Tra said the trail in October 1974 was a "far cry" from the primitive web of paths that he had first descended more than a decade earlier. It was now a super highway allowing the trip from Hanoi to Da Lat to be made by automobile in ten days.

<sup>lxxxix</sup> Arnold, 39.

<sup>xc</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

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<sup>xc</sup><sub>i</sub> Karnow, 253 and 343.

<sup>xc</sup><sub>ii</sub> Ibid, 539.

<sup>xc</sup><sub>iii</sub> Department of the Army, *FM 3-0, Operations (DRAG Edition)*, (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2000), 4-14. The manual states contributing factors to surprise. They include, speed, tempo, information superiority, and asymmetry.

<sup>xc</sup><sub>iv</sub> Vo Nguyen Giap, 54.

<sup>xc</sup><sub>v</sub> Naveh, 13.

<sup>xc</sup><sub>vi</sub> Ibid, 309. Synchronization need not depend on explicit coordination if all forces involved fully understand the intent of the commander, and if they have developed and rehearsed well-conceived standard responses to anticipated contingencies. In the chaos of battle, when communications fail and face to face, coordination is impossible, such implicit coordination may make the difference between victory and defeat. The enemy for his part will do everything in his power to disrupt the synchronization of friendly operations. The less that synchronization depends on active communication, the less vulnerable it will be.

<sup>xc</sup><sub>vii</sub> Krepinevich, 249.

<sup>xc</sup><sub>viii</sub> Ibid, 216.

<sup>xc</sup><sub>ix</sub> Naveh, 13.

<sup>c</sup> Schifferle, 40.